

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3807
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4229

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, MILI, LE, US, IS, SY, SA
SUBJECT: REBUILDING THE LEBANESE ARMY: U.S. ASSISTANCE

REF: STATE 155131

1. OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH SYRIANS EARLIER THIS YEAR ON RE-BUILDING LEBANESE ARMY HAVE INDICATED GENERAL SYRIAN/U.S. AGREEMENT THAT REBUILDING ARMY IS A HIGH PRIORITY AND THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO GIVE POLITICAL SUPPORT TO PRESIDENT SARKIS IN HIS EFFORTS TO RESTORE AUTHORITY OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. THESE REMAIN CENTRAL ELEMENTS OF SYRIAN POLICY TOWARD LEBANON. IF ANYTHING, LATEST INDICATIONS ARE THAT SYRIA WOULD LIKE TO ACCELERATE REBUILDING LEBANESE ARMY IN ORDER TO REDEPLOY AT LEAST PART OF ITS DETERRENT FORCES BACK TO GOLAN. ASSAD WILL IN OUR VIEW SUPPORT SARKIS' EFFORTS TO REESTABLISH GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY THROUGHOUT LEBANON EVEN IF IT MEANS FURTHER LIMITING PALESTINIAN FREEDOM OF ACTION.

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2. IN MAY COS SHIHABI TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT SYRIANS HAD INFORMED LEBANESE ARMY COMMANDER KHOURI SYRIA'S RESOURCES WERE STRICTLY LIMITED BUT SARG WOULD BE READY TO CONSIDER ANY REQUEST FOR TRAINING OR EQUIPMENT KHOURI MIGHT PRESENT. SO FAR AS WE AWARE KHOURI HAS NOT TAKEN UP THIS SYRIAN OFFER; HE MAY WELL BE RELUCTANT TO DO SO.

3. WE BELIEVE SYRIANS WOULD HAVE GREAT DIFFICULTY MAKING ANY FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO REBUILDING LEBANESE ARMY. SYRIA'S OWN INTERNAL ECONOMIC CRISIS IS CONTINUING AND THIS YEAR'S OPERATING BUDGET HAS HAD TO BE CUT BACK AT LEAST TWICE. WE ALSO DOUBT THAT SYRIANS WOULD HAVE MUCH EQUIPMENT TO OFFER LEBANON.

4. SYRIA, NEVERTHELESS, WILL BE GREATLY INTERESTED AND INVOLVED IN FUTURE STEPS TO REBUILD LEBANESE ARMY JUST AS THEY HAVE BEEN IN PAST IN FORMATION OF VANGUARD UNITS IN THE BEKAA. EVEN WITH INCOMPATIBLE EQUIPMENT SYRIA WOULD BE INTERESTED IN HAVING A HAND IN ORGANIZING AND TRAINING ASPECTS OF ARMY RECONSTRUCTION. THIS MIGHT INCLUDE TRAINING OF SPECIAL FORCES OR MILITARY POLICE, FOR EXAMPLE. SYRIANS WILL ALSO BE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN MAINTAINING CLOSE TIES WITH ANY LEBANESE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION.

5. OUR PROVIDING MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO LEBANON WILL FACE SYRIANS WITH A DILEMMA IN THAT THEY WILL NOT WANT TO APPEAR TO BE COOPERATING WITH U.S. IN RECONSTRUCTION TASK EVEN THOUGH THEY WELCOME OUR POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR SARKIS AND WE BELIEVE WOULD WELCOME OUR PROVIDING MILITARY EQUIPMENT. THEIR WAY OUT OF THIS DILEMMA MAY BE PRIVATELY TO SUPPORT U.S. ASSISTANCE ROLE WHILE PUBLICLY EXPRESSING SUSPICIONS REGARDING U.S. INTENTIONS, NOT ONLY IN LEBANON

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BUT IN MIDDLE EAST AS A WHOLE. AMONG OTHER THINGS, OUR INVOLVEMENT IN REBUILDING OF ARMY WILL GIVE THEM AN OPENING TO BLAME THE U.S. IF SITUATION IN LEBANON DETERIORATES ONCE AGAIN.

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